

Testimony of Nanci Planeta, submitted electronically, to the Connecticut Government Administration and Elections Committee, March 21, 2011.

Re: SB 1196 Land Conveyance Bill section 14

My name is Nanci Planeta and below are my concerns regarding Senate Bill 1196, and specifically Section 14 of that Bill.

This is a bad idea which was proposed and not approved by this committee last year, vetoed by Governor Rell the year before due to economic reasons which are even more dire this year, and rejected by the former Commissioner of the DEP, Amy Marrella, and I quote, "Release of these open space properties for development purposes would be taking a step backwards in our statutory mandate to acquire and preserve open space lands."

I will first address the parcel along the Connecticut River. This parcel was acquired by the Department of Environmental Protection because of its important qualities. The Connecticut River has been given a national scenic rivers designation, and land along this portion of the River is included in the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. We as residents of the State have a duty to retain

and maintain as much of the endangered land along the River as possible for future generations. The area on which the possible future hotel would be located has been used for generations for manufacturing, and I am certain that there will need to be remediation on a large scale before this property can be used for development. Public sewers and water would also have to be brought to this location, at considerable expense. To portray this as anything but a long-term expense is misleading and contrary to the evidence.

Regarding the Riverhouse Property. As a neighbor to this property, I can tell you that it is important in its entirety. The owner of the Riverhouse has consistently stated that he is only interested in swapping a portion of the acres, and developing the remaining acreage, but the proposed legislation does not make this distinction at all. This leads me to question whether the State and the property owner even agree as to the terms of what is to be transferred. To split this property into pieces may sound like a victory but it would destroy the continuity of the space. The omitted acreage is actually the prime portion of the Riverhouse Property. Presently, the acreage connects the Cockaponsett State Forest to the town-owned firehouse property and Route 154. This property, if owned entirely by the State,

would provide both town and state residents more convenient access to the forest from a State Highway. It would also create a walking access from the center of the municipality, which is a rare thing. Additionally, the fragmentation created by omitting a portion of the acreage from the portion to be owned by the State would break up important habitats, and place houses directly in the middle of forested area. While this may be attractive from a homeowner's standpoint, it is a mistake from an environmental protection standpoint. The property owner has claimed that the acreage contains important hardwood trees but this is another case of the State not knowing what it is acquiring. Those trees were logged a decade ago and there are no hardwoods remaining on that portion of the site.

This land swap idea has been poorly thought out. The values of the respective parcels may or may not be equivalent. That it could be "all or a portion of" just gives me pause, and should give this Committee pause as well.

I would urge this Committee to remove Section 14 from Senate Bill 51196. I am unclear who this is supposed to benefit, but it does not

benefit the residents of the Town of Haddam or State of Connecticut  
as a whole.

Thank you for your time.

Nanci Planeta